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in any manner of digital computer environment, and to the extent that the environment is well known in the art, it is not described here. One such environment that might be used is that described in U.S. Application Ser. No. 09/303,818, filed April 30, 1999 and entitled "Method and System for Processing Documents Controlled by Active Documents with Embedded Instructions"; that application is commonly owned with the present application and is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes. In that system, operations such as stapling are handled by active documents, such as stapler form 104 shown in Figure 1.

IN THE CLAIMS:

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1. (Presently Amended) In an electronic document handling system, a method of manipulating documents comprising the steps of:
- generating a staple data object, for representing an association of selected pages and selected documents;
- generating an electronic cover sheet for the staple data object;
- accepting from a user a list of at least one page of at least one electronic document;
- referencing each page or each electronic document in the list as an item of the staple data object;
- accepting a staple instruction from a user; and
- cryptographically securing the staple data object in response to receipt of the staple instruction.
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2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of accepting a list is a step of accepting a manually input list.
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3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of accepting a list is a step of accepting a computer-generated list.

1                   4.     The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of presenting a  
2 user with an online form as an aid to selecting pages or documents for association as a  
3 stack.

1                   5.     The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of prompting for  
2 the staple instruction by presenting the user with a stapler icon which, when selected,  
3 represents the staple instruction.

1                   6.     The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of copying the  
2 selected pages and selected documents in a stack to static storage.

1                   7.     The method of claim 1, further comprising a step of copying the  
2 selected pages and selected documents in a stack to a local storage device local to the  
3 electronic document handling system.

1                   8.     The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:  
2                   displaying a first list of documents, wherein the first list of documents lists  
3 the documents that are selected for inclusion in an open stack;  
4                   displaying a second list of documents, wherein the second list of  
5 documents list documents that have not been selected for inclusion in an open stack; and  
6                   displaying a user interface control operative to obtain selections from a  
7 user of documents from the second list for inclusion in an open stack.

1                   9.     (Presently Amended) In an electronic document handling system,  
2 a method of associating documents comprising the steps of:  
3                   generating a stack object, for representing an association of selected pages and  
4                   selected documents;  
5                   generating an electronic cover sheet for the stack object;  
6                   accepting from a user a list of at least one page of at least one electronic document;

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7       referencing each page or each electronic document in the list as an item of the stack  
8       object;  
9       accepting a staple instruction from a user;  
10      cryptographically securing the stack object in response to receipt of the staple  
11      instruction;  
12      opening a secured stack upon receipt of a stack open instruction;  
13      presenting the contents of the secured stack for perusal by the user;  
14      accepting additions and deletions of items on the secured stack; and  
15      resecuring the secure stack upon receipt of a stack restaple operation.

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1                   10.   (New) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of  
2   cryptographically securing the stack object in response to receipt of the staple instruction  
3   further comprises:  
4                   using a stack signature to secure the stack object, wherein the stack  
5   signature is a checksum of the contents of all of the selected pages and selected  
6   documents in the stack, signed by the digital signature of a user or the digital signature or  
7   private key of a system.

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1                   11.   (New) The method of claim 10 wherein the step of generating an  
2   electronic cover sheet for the stack object further comprises:  
3                   storing the electronic cover sheet in a stack database, where it can be  
4   referenced.

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1                   12.   (New) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of generating an  
2   electronic cover sheet for the stack object further comprises:  
3                   generating controls for adding and deleting selected pages and selected  
4   documents from the stack.

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